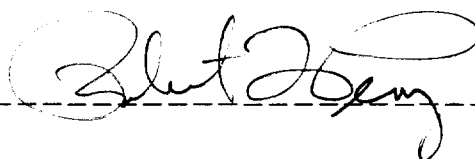


The Effectiveness of Campaign Techniques in Raising Voter Support

An Honors Thesis (Honors 499)

by
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Because there is so much time, effort, and money being put into local elections, it is important for candidates and their staff to know which campaign tactics will be most effective. Much of the material available about how to run a campaign and studies on effective campaign tactics focus on those techniques which involve the mass media-- tactics which may not be relevant to the local candidate.

Political campaigns become more competitive each year. Candidates are always looking for the tactics that will give them advantage enough to win and are more and more willing to spend a great deal of money executing those tactics.

Although state and national elections receive the most attention, there is also a great deal of money and effort being spent in local elections. The local candidate will on the average spend tens of thousands of dollars and will likely have a staff of at least two people (Steinberg p. 8). Steinberg "Levels of Campaigning" define local campaigns (Level C) as those that are seeking election to "U. S. Congress, state senate or assembly, mayor, city council, board of education or other local office" (p. 8).

A campaign is an organized, managed effort to distribute information to elect, reelect, or nominate a candidate. The campaign period provides an important opportunity for voters to collect information about elected officials and those seeking office (Goldberg & Traugott p. 109). Because voters generally have to recognize candidates before they can evaluate them, recognition is a pivotal factor in voting decisions (p. 136). Key to getting your message to the voters is raising name identification, having voters conscious of the candidates name and are able to know the name as a candidate for a certain office. Also important, but different from name recognition, is candidate identification. Candidate identification is reached when voters recognize not only the candidate's name but what he looks like, what his personality is like, and what he stands for. Of course, the levels of achievement in both of these areas is gauged by the number of votes the candidate receives. The

greater the name recognition, the greater the candidate identification, which leads to a greater number of votes, which will hopefully result in victory.

Several campaign techniques are used to raise name recognition and candidate identification in order to win elections. The purpose of this study is to prove which techniques are most effective at accomplishing this. By knowing which tactics work best, local candidates will be better able to allocate their time, money, and people.

METHOD

By running a campaign for a local office and using different campaign tactics in different precincts it would be possible to determine which techniques are most effective in achieving voter support. This thesis was tested in a local election experiment.

The experiment was administered through the campaign of James Poinsett, a 22-year-old college student. The candidate ran for an at-large City Council seat in the 1991 Republican primary in Muncie, Indiana. Because of the candidate's status as a college student, it was assumed that he had virtually zero name recognition in the areas of the community that were not affected by the university. The filing period for this election was February through March, while the campaign period was the following 60 days. None of the candidates had an extended amount of time in which to build support during the campaign period.

There are several campaign techniques used in an election; some are successful while others fail. This experiment tested six techniques commonly employed and thought to be worthwhile. The campaign tactics used in the experiment were: direct mail, sending a letter through first class mail asking for

voter support; door-to-door (direct contact), having the candidate go to each door in a precinct and talk with the voters face-to-face; door-to-door (literature drop), using volunteers to distribute literature to each doorstep without intentionally making any personal contact with the voters; door-to-door (third party), using volunteers to go to each doorstep and personally asking the voter to support a certain candidate; telephone calls, having the candidate call voters and ask for their support; and yard signs, placing yardsigns in the yards of supporters and along roadsides--replacing them whenever destroyed by weather, opponents or vandals.

Subjects

The results of the study were derived from the number of votes the candidate received; in other words, the response of the voters. There were six precincts (2, 33, 34, 36, 38, 47) chosen for the experiment; the remaining 49 precincts served as the control group. The experimental precincts were chosen on the basis of :

- (1) High Republican vote total general election during last ten years--average more than 200
- (2) Proportion of Republican vote--concentration of Republicans was 50 percent or better
- (3) None of the precincts were adjacent to precincts linked to the campus vote

The experimental precincts were chosen in these areas because of the need to find precincts that would support the Republican ballot and not be influenced by the campus. The voter's choice on the ballot is translated as recognition of the candidate's identity.

There were several reasons for choosing the Republican primary in Muncie. First of all, as with most studies in the social sciences, it is difficult to set up totally

experimental conditions. As Robert and Helen Lynd found during the Middletown Studies, Muncie is the city that is best suited to be as representative as possible of contemporary American life and at the same time compact and homogeneous enough to be manageable in such a total-situation study. In order to secure a certain amount of compactness and homogeneity, the following characteristics were sought: (1) a mid-sized city, a city of this size, it was felt, would be large enough to have put on long trousers and to take itself seriously, and yet small enough to be studied from many aspects as a unit. (2) A city as nearly self-contained as is possible in this era of rapid and pervasive inter-communication, not a satellite city. (3) A relative small minority and ethnic population. In a study such as this it seemed to be a distinct advantage to deal with a homogeneous, native-born population (Lynd p. 8). Even today social researchers follow the Lynds' studies and revisit Muncie--Middletown, America.

The next factor that made this primary an interesting experiment was that on the same ballot was a tightly contested race for the mayoral nomination. Because of the mayor's race, the level of awareness of the voters was high. The high voter attentiveness to the election made voters more selective in their choice for all of the races on the ballot.

This election was also studied because there were five candidates running for only three spots. This increased the chance that voters would be more selective--helping prove the study's effectiveness. The ballot was filled with five candidates seeking the nomination. Because the voters could only select three of the five, they were likely to select the candidate they could recognize or identify.

On the ballot were four candidates with prior political experience in Muncie, increasing the advantage of identification with the voters over Poinsett. The first

candidate listed on the ballot was Basil Davis Sr., who unsuccessfully sought the Democratic nomination for Delaware County Council seats in 1988 and 1990, and ran as a Republican this year. The next candidate, Sandra K. Edwards, ran for Delaware County auditor in 1990 as a write-in candidate. Candidate Mike Rost, in 1990 ran an unsuccessful campaign for Delaware County Council. The last candidate, Don Slaughter, who had never ran for office before, is the former superintendent of the Muncie Community Schools--a position that is very much in the public eye (McGauley p.7).

Finally, the election was held during the second week in May, after all of the college students had left for the summer. This way their numbers did not effect the numbers of the control group.

Procedure

During the two month period of the campaign the candidate carried out the tactics in the appropriate precincts. The phases of the experiment were completed in a four week period from the first week in April up until the first weekend in May.

Yardsigns were placed in the appropriate precinct as early as possible. The signs stayed in place for the entire length of the campaign period, and they were replaced whenever they were destroyed by weather, stolen, or knocked over. Most signs were located along the road sides throughout the precinct.

On a Saturday, two weekends before the election, a group of volunteers helped the candidate complete the door-to-door (third party). The goal of the group that was involved with door-to-door (third party) was to make the voters aware that the candidate was running and to provide more information about him. The group split up into pairs and went to each address, asked for support for the candidate and left a printed card identifying the candidate and his party.

On that same Saturday the same volunteers helped the candidate complete the door-to-door (literature drop). Those that were involved in the door-to-door (literature drop) went to each address and simply left a flyer attached to the door. The volunteers made no effort to talk to the voters.

Telephone canvassing was used in the two weeks leading to the election. This tactic involved the candidate making telephone calls to Republican voters in the designated precinct. The candidate reached the voter, introduced himself and asked for their support.

Finally, the candidate completed the door-to-door (direct contact) phase of the experiment during the week leading up to the campaign. He went to each home, spoke personally to a voter in the house, and left a printed card similar to the one used in the door-to-door (third party).

All homes were identified from lists of Republican voters in the previous primaries compiled by the Delaware County Republican Central Committee.

In the remaining precincts no campaigning was done; thus it provided an extensive control group of 49 precincts. The candidate, like other candidates, carried on other general campaign activities such as fundraising, news interviews, dinners, appearances, etc. However, none of the activities were targeted at gaining support in certain precincts more than other precincts.

RESULTS

On election night, Poinsett finished in the last spot with 1542 total votes-- within 500 votes of the top vote getter (See Table 1). When the election returns were final, the percentage of votes in the test precincts were taken against the percentage of votes in the control precincts ($p=0.136$). The precincts where campaigning took place did at least 9 percent better than the control precincts and ranged anywhere

Table 1

Name	Total Votes
Slauter	2,816
Rost	2,639
Edwards	2,099
Davis	1,617
Poinsett	1,542

Table 2

Technique	Precinct	x Voters	Percent	Index	t
Door (direct contact)	36	326	0.212	1.559	3.310*
Yardsigns	2	787	0.169	1.242	2.357*
Door (literature drop)	38	373	0.166	1.220	1.530
Door (third party)	33	528	0.153	1.125	1.060
Direct Mail	34	625	0.152	1.117	1.060
Telephone	47	462	0.149	1.095	0.760
Control	--	7612	0.136	1.000	----
* Significant when $t > 1.645$ which is a $p\text{-value} < 0.05$					

from 14.9 percent to 21.2 percent better than the control. This supports the notion that campaigning is effective in raising support.

More specifically, the study showed that door-to-door (direct contact) and yard signs made a statistically significant difference in the voting patterns. Door-to-door (direct contact) ($p=0.0212$) improved the vote total by 56 percent ($t=3.31$) and the yard signs ($p=0.0169$) increased the total by 24 percent ($t=2.357$) (See Table 2).

Although the other tactics did improve the percentage of the vote total none of them made a significant difference. The next best was the precinct with the literature drop ($p=0.166$); door-to-door (third party) ($p=0.153$) and direct mail ($p=0.152$) both did about the same; telephone canvassing ($p=0.149$) did the poorest in raising the vote total.

DISCUSSION

Door-to-door (direct contact) and yard signs have proven to be the most effective techniques for increasing candidate identification in a local campaign. Before a candidate can begin establishing platforms and debating issues it is important he has the voter's attention. It will be difficult to gain their attention if they do not know the candidate. By being out to see as many voters as possible and establishing an identification with them it will make them a much more receptive audience. After the 1978 elections, Goldberg & Traugott asked managers which of eight different information dissemination techniques they had used in their campaigns. Virtually every campaign relied on personal contact with the voters (p. 115).

Although it is time consuming, the advantages of using door-to-door (direct contact) are invaluable. The people remember you, and appreciate the effort you are

making to contact them; thus they will be more willing to listen to and be receptive to your message. The voters want to know the candidate, shake his hand, look him in the eye, and decide for themselves if they can trust him to manage their political affairs (Roper p. 57).

Yardsigns are useful in local campaigns since they achieve name recognition as well as party identification in situations where the latter is helpful. Local campaigns should exploit every opportunity to place posters or yardsigns (Steinberg p. 35). The effect of yard signs is potent. In 1976, Lynda Lee Kaid studied advertising in a Illinois election for state representative and found that outdoor advertising techniques were recalled more often than radio spots. Her exit poll of voters showed that 41.3 percent of the voters recalled the candidate's signs (p. 50), clearly showing that yard signs effectively raise the candidate's name recognition.

Although the other campaign techniques did not significantly raise name identification or candidate identification, it is not to say that the other tactics are without any merit. All of these techniques were tested on their own. If you were to use two or three techniques to compliment each other the results would be completely different.

The door-to-door (literature drop) is a technique that would be most effective if used to reinforce name recognition rather than build it. The goals are much the same as for the door-to-door (direct contact): to inform voters that your candidate is running; to identify voters who will vote for him; to provide more information about the candidate (Herzberg p. 39)

There are numerous advantages to the literature drop, especially in districts with many volunteers. It is a fast and inexpensive way to distribute information to the voters. Once the voter receives the material it is more effective because it has

been personally delivered. And it also dramatizes the vitality of the candidates' organization and gives an impression of massive activity (p. 45).

Likewise, the door-to-door (third party) is better suited as a reinforcement technique. The door-to-door (direct contact) is the most effective technique, but the candidate's time is the most limited campaign resource in a constituency of any reasonable size. The candidate then has to rely on using surrogates as a means of contacting voters (Goldberg & Traugott p. 109). However this should be used as a substitute for direct contact only when the candidate absolutely does not have time to walk door-to-door. Third party contact is best used for polling voters, recruiting volunteers, reinforcing prior messages, and getting out the vote.

Direct mail is the single most effective method of distributing printed campaign material. However, all mailings should seek volunteers and funds (Steinberg p. 33). Raising name identification with direct mail is not extremely effective because many people do not wish to read material from people they have not heard from. However, if name recognition is already built, direct mail is an excellent method for rifling information to the target audience that will distinguish the candidate from the rest of the field and help the voters identify him and his stance on issues. For most campaigns, direct mail should be primarily used for carefully planned mailing to priority lists and rarely used for general mailings to registered voters who cannot be defined or categorized by additional characteristics (p. 159). Because of its expense and the nature of printed material, direct mail is best used as an element in the overall campaign plan than method for raising name recognition.

The telephone canvass is not a substitute for door-to-door canvassing. Nothing can replace face-to-face meetings; this explains why the telephone

technique did the poorest. The voters have nothing to judge you by except the sound of your voice and nothing to remember you by because you cannot leave anything with them.

However, the telephone can be used as a supplement, or under certain circumstances, when there are not enough personal canvassers, as an inadequate replacement for personal contact (Herzberg p. 39). The telephone is a valuable tool for polling voters and getting out the vote. A campaign will be seriously handicapped if the telephone is not used for those purposes, but it cannot be relied upon to raise name recognition or candidate information.

There is no substitute for direct contact between the candidate and their potential constituents. Any personal contact usually leads to recognition among voters (Goldberg & Traugott p.138). However, door-to-door (direct contact) and yard-signs are the best techniques to raise candidate identification and name recognition.

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